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ABSTRACT

Until recently, the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union appeared to have escaped the worst of the AIDS epidemic. In 1994 there were 30,000 reported HIV infections, but by the end of 1997 the number had climbed to 190,000. The theory of planned behavior (TPB) for explanatory utility among young adults and their use of condoms was examined for its ability to predict student behavior. The AIDS Planned Behavior Scale was translated into Russian and administered to 329 students at the University of Vilnius, Lithuania. The results highlight the limited cross-cultural utility of the theory of planned behavior for predicting condom use among young adults. Interventions to increase condom use among sexually active Lithuanians should focus on changing attitudes, which may be accomplished by changing norms concerning condom use. Developing skill-building programs designed to improve the mechanics of condom use among young adults, and the associated self-efficacy, will effectively increase condom use and reduce sexually transmitted diseases. The data demonstrated that providing basic condom use instruction is an essential condition to effective changes in social norms and attitudes towards condoms in Lithuania. (Author/JDM)

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Predicting Condom Use Among Young Lithuanian Adults

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Predicting Condom Use Among Young Lithuanian Adults

Until recently, the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union appeared to have escaped the worst of the AIDS epidemic. There were 30,000 reported HIV infections at the end of 1994 in a region of more than 450 million people. By the end of 1997 there were 190,000 infections (UNAIDS, 1998). It is estimated that nearly 40,000 people in the Russian Federation alone may be HIV positive (UNAIDS, 1998). While some of these staggering increases can be attributed to improvements in testing and reporting, clearly the AIDS pandemic has reached Eastern and Central Europe.

Most new infections in the region are a result of injecting drug use (IDU). In Poland, for example, the large majority (70%) of HIV infections are a result of injecting drug use (Danziger, 1996). However, the AIDS pandemic will not be limited to IDUs in the future. It has been well documented that HIV positive IDUs infect others not only through sharing works (i.e., syringes), but also through sexual contact for drugs, money, or relationship purposes. It is clear from large increases of other sexual transmitted diseases (STDs) in Eastern Europe, that people are placing themselves at risk for HIV infection by failing to practice safer sexual behaviors (UNAIDS, 1998). Though the majority of new HIV infections in Eastern Europe occur among IDUs, now is the time to investigate reasons for unsafe sex among young, sexually active adults.

This study was examines the theory of planned behavior (TPB) for explanatory utility among young adults attending the University of Vilnius, Lithuania. The theory of planned behavior posits that behavior is a function of behavioral intentions, which in turn are a function of attitudes toward condom use and subjective norms about condoms attributed to a person's significant others (e.g., sexual partners, close friends, etc.) (Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1989). The advent of the TPB included self-efficacy as a critical element of behavioral intentions.

Method

Participants

The 329 voluntary study participants (65% females) were included as part of a convenience sample from the schools of education and veterinary medicine at the University of Vilnius, Lithuania. Of the 225 sexually active participants from whom usable data was collected, 12% reported being married or in a committed relationship and the large majority reported ethnic background as Lithuanian (81.3%). Respondent ages ranged from 18 to 29 with an average age of 20.43 (SD= 1.89).

Instruments

The AIDS Planned Behavior Scale (APBS; Zagumny, Salyer, & Fraley, 1999) was translated from English into Russian by two bilingual professionals and

then reverse translated by a third person fluent in English and Russian. The 6 point Likert-type, self-report APBS assessed self-efficacy concerning condom use in four situations: (1) negotiating condom use with a new partner, (2) discussing use with a current partner, (3) proper use of condoms, and (4) using condoms under the influence of alcohol or passion. The survey also measured behavioral intentions to use condoms and attitudes toward condom use. Assessment of subjective norms concerning condom use involved calculating weighted scores of perceived importance placed on condom use by significant others (i.e., sexual partner, close friends, health care provides, and parents). The range of possible scale values for the weighted subjective norms was 1 to 36. Two dependent variables measures were analyzed in separate regression equations. One dependent variable, intention to use condoms in the future, was measured by one 6-point Likert-type scale item that asked, "What is your intention to use a latex condom the next time you have sex?" The other dependent measure was a single, true-false item that asked "The last time I had sex, I used a latex condom."

Analysis

To examine the utility of the TPB, intentions to use condoms was regressed on participants' age, gender, and HIV/AIDS knowledge, which were entered in the first hierarchical block followed by attitudes toward condoms and the subjective norms attributed to the four significant others in the participants'

lives. The third hierarchical block entered self-efficacy measures of ability to use condoms while under the influence of alcohol/passion, the mechanics of proper condom use, negotiating condom use with a new partner, and negotiating with a current partner.

Results

Results showed that the complete model accounted for 32% of the variance in students' intentions to use condoms in the future. Relationship status significantly predicted intentions to use condoms in the future (β = -.26, t = -3.08, $p < .003$), with respondents not in a relationship reporting greater intention to use condoms. Attitudes toward condom use (β = .19, t = 2.44, $p < .02$) and the subjective norm about a sexual partner's desire to use condoms (β = .27, t = 3.12, $p < .002$) were significantly related to intentions to use condoms during the next sexual activity.

The second regression equation showed that self-efficacy with the mechanics of condom use was the only significant predictor of condom use during the last sexual activity. The linear model accounted for only 20% of the total variance in previous condom use.

Discussion

This study highlights the limited cross-cultural utility of the theory of planned behavior for predicting condom use among young adults. Interventions to

increase condom use among sexually active young Lithuanians should focus on changing attitudes, which may be accomplished by changing norms concerning condom use. Additionally, developing skills-building programs designed to improve the mechanics of condom use among young adults, and the associated self-efficacy, will effectively increase condom use and reduce sexually transmitted diseases. A possible associated outcome of such skills-building programs may be improved attitudes toward the use of condoms, leading to an increase in condom use in the future. As with US samples (e.g., Zagumny, Salyer, & Fraley, 1998), differential predictive utility was observed across previous use and intentions to use condoms in the future. These differences must be considered in the design and implementation of HIV/STD prevention programs. These data demonstrate that providing basic condom use instruction is an *a priori* condition to effective changes in social norms and attitudes toward condoms in Lithuania.

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